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Casey says U.S. media endangers sources

By Ed Rogers
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Journalists have put U.S. intelligence sources in jeopardy and strained relations with security services in friendly countries by publishing national secrets, CIA Director William J. Casey bluntly told a gathering of newspaper editors yesterday.

Both printed and broadcast news stories have contributed to this damage in recent years, Mr. Casey said in an address before the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

"When we promise our sources confidentiality," he said, "we in many cases literally hold their lives in our hands."

"Every method we have of acquiring intelligence, our agents, our relationship with friendly intelligence and security services around the world, our photo-

graphic and electronic capabilities, the information we get from communications — all this has been damaged by the publication of classified information," Mr. Casey said.

Howard Simons, former managing editor of The Washington Post, said in response that while it is the government's job to keep secrets, it is "the job of reporters and editors to learn secrets."

Mr. Simons said the issue is not "government secrets" but "secret government," and argued that many of the thousands of "top secret" documents are classified to avoid embarrassment rather than to safeguard national security.

The former editor, who is now curator of the Nieman Foundation for journalists, at Harvard University, then asked, "Do I think editors ought to publish everything

they learn?" His answer was, "Of course not."

The confrontation did not touch off a heated debate that some had expected. Mr. Casey said, "I don't have very much disagreement with what Mr. Simons has said."

The CIA director had already conceded that some of the disclosures of classified information were leaked by government employees who held security clearances, but asked why such illegal acts draw little press criticism.

"Classified leaks are at least as damaging as the cost overruns, the conflicts of interest and other types of malfeasance so ably and properly criticized by the press," Mr. Casey said.

"Among the thousands of editorials about the failings of government employees, I can recall few, if any, that took a

public servant to task for illegally revealing classified information," he said.

"That's really where the primary responsibility rests, and the inability to control sensitive information is destructive of the morale of those who do keep secrets, as well as damaging to our security," Mr. Casey said.

Protecting the confidentiality of the CIA's security sources is as important to the national interest as protecting the confidentiality of news sources is to journalists, he said.

"As we respect the right of the press to gather and publish the news and applaud your exposure of waste, corruption and other misconduct, I hope you will respect our duty to keep the nation's legitimate secrets," he said.

"I believe we are all working for the same goal — maintaining this as the best and most free country in the world."